

GUIDE TO HUNTING WILD TURKEYS IN CALIFORNIA



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
WILDLIFE PROGRAMS BRANCH



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Front cover photo courtesy of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

GUIDE TO HUNTING WILD TURKEYS IN CALIFORNIA

This guide provides turkey hunters in California with information for hunting wild turkeys responsibly, safely and successfully. We hope that hunters will pursue turkeys in an ethical manner and establish a tradition for future California turkey hunters. Consider what you can do to promote the future of turkey management and hunting in California.

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NATURAL HISTORY

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is a member of the bird order Galliformes which also includes grouse, pheasants, partridge and quail. This wild turkey species is the largest game bird in North America and is subdivided into five groups, or subspecies. The five subspecies are the eastern turkey (*M.g. silvestris*), the Florida turkey (*M.g. Osceola*), the Gould's turkey (*M.g. mexicana*), the Rio Grande turkey (*M.g. intermedia*), and the Merriam's turkey (*M.g. merriami*). These subspecies may be recognized by their slightly different appearance and their geographic location within North America. The two primary subspecies found in California are the Rio Grande and Merriam's subspecies. Eastern turkeys and various hybrid turkeys have also been released in the state. Prior to the late 1950s, turkeys had become established primarily along the central coast from DFG game farms. They were a hybrid from various sources that were referred to as California hybrids.

To identify the subspecies, one must consider their physical characteristics and habitat. The characteristics used to identify the subspecies of wild turkey are usually body size, coloration of feathers and body proportions. There are overlapping characteristics between each of the subspecies, but a comparison of several different characteristics may help identify the subspecies. The following table is a guide to identifying a wild turkey to subspecies. Keep in mind that wild turkeys, like all living things, exhibit much variation, which at times can make identification to subspecies difficult.

CURRENT DISTRIBUTION

In California, Rio Grande turkeys are the most widespread subspecies. They occupy much of the mixed oak and pine woodlands of the Coast Ranges, Sierra Nevada and Cascade foothills, and they can be found primarily from sea level to about 3,000 feet in elevation, but occasionally as high as 5,000 - 6,000 feet. Merriam's turkeys occupy habitats dominated by pines, primarily above 3,000 feet, in northeastern California, but also in the Transverse Range in Kern County. Additionally, the eastern subspecies has been released along the northern coast and eastern/Rio Grande hybrids from the Midwest have been released along the south coast. Hybridization between subspecies has probably occurred in various parts of the state.

Wild turkeys are now present in 54 of 58 counties, with the highest harvest occurring in Butte, Calaveras, El Dorado, Mendocino, Nevada, San Luis Obispo, Shasta, Tehama, and Yuba counties. Many populations range on private land, but populations can be found on property owned or controlled by California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and public utilities such as Pacific Gas and Electric.

IDENTIFICATION OF WILD TURKEY SUBSPECIES

CHARACTERISTIC	EASTERN TURKEY	MERRIAM'S TURKEY	RIO GRANDE TURKEY
Body Appearance	Metallic bronze with gold	Purple/Bronze Very dark	Coppery to greenish gold
Tail Feather Tips	Cinnamon to dark chestnut	Buff to pinkish white	Cinnamon to buff
Upper Tail Coverts	Chestnut brown to buff	Nearly white	Cinnamon to buff
Rump Feathers (Lower Back)	Copper	Nearly white	Greenish gold to bluish black

SEX AND AGE DIFFERENCES

Wild turkey males are called gobblers, or toms, if mature, and jakes if immature. Wild turkey females (hens) are called jennys if immature. Adult males and females can be differentiated by feather color, head color, and the presence or absence of leg spurs and beards. Gobblers have black-tipped breast feathers while the hens have buff-tipped breast feathers. Head color is usually gray-blue in hens while gobblers have shades of red, blue, and white. Gobblers also have fleshy head and neck adornments called caruncles, dewlap and snood. Unlike gobblers, hens do not usually have leg spurs.

Generally, gobblers have a coarse group of bristly-type feathers called a beard hanging from their chests. Hens can also have beards which are usually more sparse than gobbler beards. In the fall, the sex of young turkeys can only be differentiated by examining the breast feathers to



Breast feathers of adult female (left) and male (right).

see if the male black-tipped feathers are starting to come in.

Spur length is a reliable method for aging males, except where spurs are extremely worn. Generally, spring yearlings, also called jakes, have short spurs less than 12 mm (0.5 inch); spurs on 2 year-olds are 12-25 mm (0.5-1.0 inch) long; and birds 3 years or older usually have spurs over 25 mm (1.0 inch). In fall, gobblers have obvious spurs while juvenile males have a very small or inconspicuous spur. Spur length varies among subspecies.

The age of turkeys can also be determined using feather criteria. The last two primaries, or outer wing feathers, in juveniles lack white bars on the outer two inches and are sharply pointed. Adult birds have rounded or worn outer primaries with white bars to the tip. In spring, the central tail feathers are longer than the remaining feathers in jakes, while all tail feathers of adults are the same length.

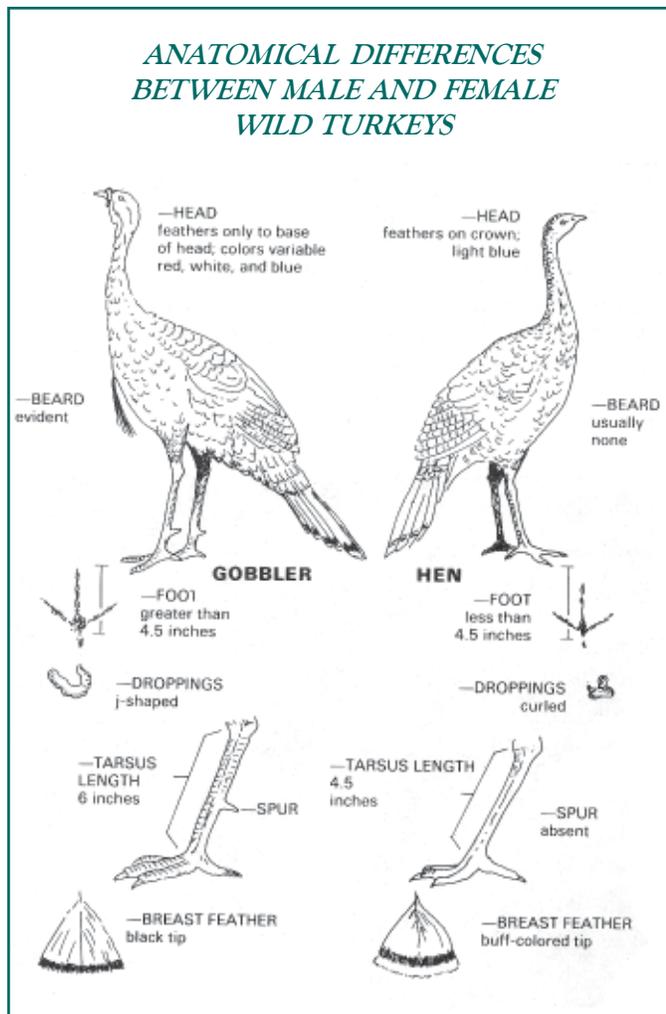
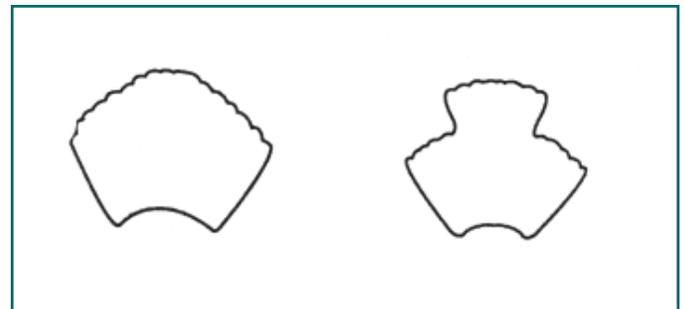


Diagram courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation.

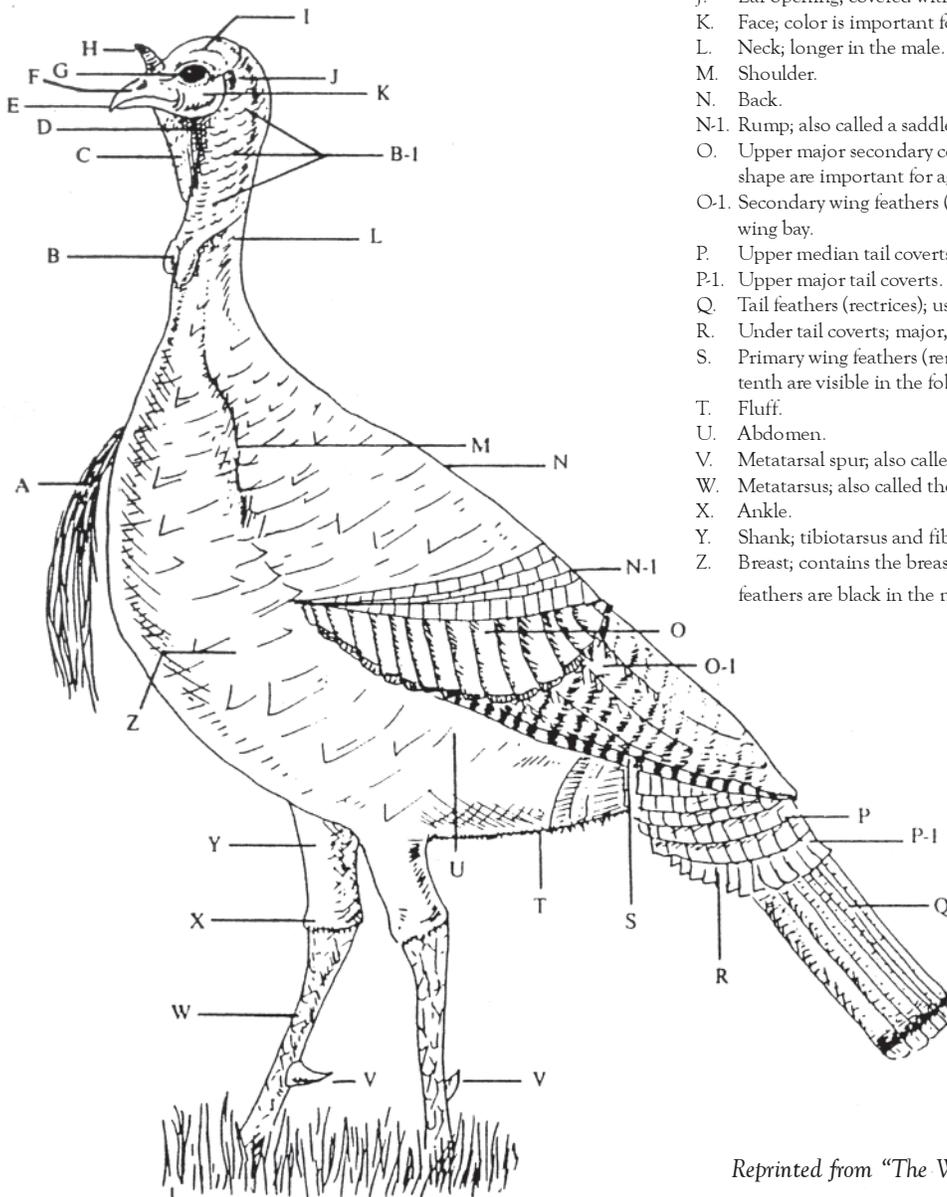


Comparison of tail feather length of gobblers (left) and jakes (right). Diagram courtesy of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

EXTERNAL ANATOMY OF THE ADULT MALE WILD TURKEY

KEY

- A Beard.
- B Major caruncles; large and bulbous shaped in the male.
- B-1 Minor caruncles.
- C Dewlap.
- D Throat.
- E Beak.
- F Nostril.
- G Eye.
- H Snood; also called a dewbill or leader, prominent in the male.
- I Crown of head; color is white or red in the male, especially during mating season; color is dull gray-blue in the female year-round.
- J Ear opening; covered with bristle feathers.
- K Face; color is important for sex identification.
- L Neck; longer in the male.
- M Shoulder.
- N Back.
- N-1 Rump; also called a saddle.
- O Upper major secondary coverts; these form the wing bar, and their size and shape are important for age identification.
- O-1 Secondary wing feathers (remiges); they number 18 or 19 and form the wing bay.
- P Upper median tail coverts.
- P-1 Upper major tail coverts.
- Q Tail feathers (rectrices); usually number 18.
- R Under tail coverts; major, median, and minor.
- S Primary wing feathers (remiges); 10 in number; usually only the ninth and tenth are visible in the folded wing.
- T Fluff.
- U Abdomen.
- V Metatarsal spur; also called tarsometatarsal spur and tarsal spur.
- W Metatarsus; also called the tarsometatarsus and tarsus; longer in the gobbler.
- X Ankle.
- Y Shank; tibiotalarsus and fibula.
- Z Breast; contains the breast sponge in mating season; color of tips of breast feathers are black in the male and tan to brown in the female.



Reprinted from "The Wild Turkey: Biology and Management."

HABITAT NEEDS

The wild turkey's habitat needs include roosting and nesting cover, brood-rearing habitat, and dependable food and water sources. Oak habitats with a permanent water source have been described as the major requirements for wild turkeys in California. In California, Merriam's turkeys utilize Ponderosa pine habitats, and pinyon-juniper in association with Ponderosa and Jeffrey pines. Roosting habitat includes large trees with horizontal limbs such as gray pines, sycamores, cottonwoods, black oaks and Ponderosa pines. Nesting cover often includes brush or downed tree limbs close to a permanent water

source. Turkeys raise their broods in more open oak grasslands or in meadows at higher elevations where large numbers of insects can be found. Insects are an important source of protein, particularly for young turkeys, called poults. Other important foods are acorns from oaks and mast from other nut-producing hardwoods, and berries from brush and vines. In summer and fall, turkeys feed on wild seeds from grasses. Natural and agricultural lands adjacent to oak habitats provide forage, in the form of vegetation and seeds, on a seasonal basis.

HOME RANGE AND MOVEMENTS

Home range is the area that an animal occupies during most of the year. The size of the home range varies depending on the turkey's age, sex, and the season. Wild turkeys usually disperse in the spring as they prepare to breed. Females typically move greater distances than males, and yearlings move farther than adults. Wild turkeys in California apparently do not have separate

summer and winter ranges, and tend to stay close to their water source during the summer.

Daily movements, in general, are related to the availability of water, food, and roost sites. In the spring, turkeys will move between suitable strutting areas and roost sites, and hens will move between nesting areas and feeding areas in the late spring and summer.



Wild turkeys in California oak woodlands. DFG file photo.

BREEDING AND NESTING BIOLOGY

The breeding season for wild turkeys occurs during spring when increasing day length triggers breeding behavior (gobbling and strutting) in male birds. In California, this behavior intensifies in early March and progresses until mid to late April. Hens become receptive to mating following dispersal of large winter flocks. Dominant gobblers do most of the breeding and may breed with many hens, but it is unclear how often individual hens breed with different gobblers.

A roosting gobbler sometimes gobbles in his roost tree until a group of hens gathers on his primary strutting area. The gobbler then flies down and stays with the hens throughout the day. Later in the season, as more and more hens begin to incubate their eggs, gobblers are more likely to be found alone or in pairs or trios. These lone gobblers become more nomadic, looking for hens that have not yet mated or that may have had their nests destroyed.

Most hens select a woodland nest site. The nest is a simple depression in leaf litter and is usually located against the base of a tree, a large rock or some other vertical structure.

Clutch size varies, averaging 11 eggs, and requires about two weeks to complete. After all eggs are laid, incubation begins and continues for 28 days, with the hen leaving the nest only for a short break each day. Predators cause most nest losses. Hens disrupted



Spring courtship: gobbler displaying (strutting) for hen. Photo by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

during laying or early incubation often reneest, but only one brood is produced each year.

Wild turkey poults grow rapidly and can fly short distances within 10 days, but they roost on the ground with the hen until they are about two weeks old. During this period, poults are especially vulnerable to predation and other mortality factors, and approximately 50 percent survive.



Hen nesting in thistle.

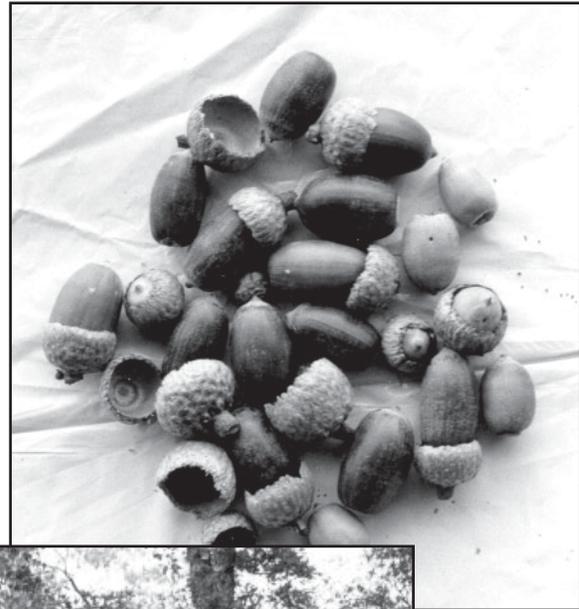


Turkey nest with hatched eggs.

FOOD HABITS

Adult wild turkeys are opportunistic feeders and consume a wide variety of food items. The bulk of their diet consists of plant material, although animal matter is seasonally important. Common food items include acorns, dandelion flowers, grasses, toyon fruit, California bay fruit and insects. Young poults require a high protein diet for growth; therefore they consume a higher ratio of insects to plant material which decreases with maturity.

In a study conducted in San Luis Obispo County, wild oat seeds were a major component of the spring and summer diet, replaced by acorns in the fall. Cultivated oats and barley, and wild forbs made up the winter diet.



Oak acorns (mast).



Turkey habitat with toyon bush and oaks.



Toyon fruit.

WILD TURKEY MANAGEMENT

THE EXTINCT CALIFORNIA TURKEY

Remnants of an extinct California turkey (*Meleagris californica*) have been discovered in several counties in California. Most of these locations are in the southern part of California, including Santa Barbara, Orange, and Los Angeles counties. Over 11,000 bones of the California turkey have been unearthed from the Rancho La Brea Tar Pits located within the metropolitan area of Los Angeles. Bones from all age classes have been discovered, and it is assumed that the turkeys nested, hatched, matured and died in this area. The adult California turkey was slightly smaller in size and had different morphological characteristics, such as a wider, shorter beak, when compared to the modern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). It is believed that this turkey became extinct about 10,000 years ago due to the loss of required vegetation resulting from a decrease in rainfall.



Fossil skeleton of extinct California wild turkey (Meleagris californica). Photo courtesy of the George C. Page Museum.

INTRODUCTION OF WILD TURKEYS TO CALIFORNIA



A DFG biologist releases a wild turkey during a translocation project.

Wild turkeys in California are the result of introductions which started before the turn of the century, and are managed as resident game birds. The first recorded release of turkeys into the wild was in 1877, when they were released by private ranchers onto Santa Cruz Island off the coast of Santa Barbara County. In 1908 the Fish and Game Commission purchased 22 turkeys from Mexico and released them in the San Bernadino Mountains. An additional 26 turkeys from Mexico were used as game farm stock. The first recorded releases of farm-raised birds from this stock were in 1928. From 1928 to 1951, 3,350 farm-raised turkeys were released at 71 different sites in 23 counties, resulting in only three successful populations. The low success rate of these efforts led to the discontinuation of this program. Other states also found the release of farm-raised turkeys into the wild to be inadvisable.

A lack of efficient trapping methods impaired the trapping and relocation of wild turkeys until the development of the cannon-net trap, a device which uses explosives to propel a net over turkeys which have gathered to feed on bait. Capturing wild turkeys in adequate numbers for stocking purposes was now feasible, and the release of wild-trapped birds has become successful in establishing new flocks. From 1959 to 1999 there have been 3,800 wild trapped turkeys released at over 200 locations in California. These methods of translocating wild turkeys have provided a new game bird in California, bringing with it many additional economical and recreational benefits.

The first turkey hunt in California was a one-day hunt conducted in San Luis Obispo County in 1968. It was extended to a two-day hunt in 1969. The fall hunting opportunity continued to expand, and in 1971 a spring season was added. Currently, there is a spring hunting season statewide and a fall season in all counties except San Diego.



Cannon net drops on wild turkeys. Photo by Larry McKibben, DFG.



Capture of wild turkeys. WDNR photo.



Leg bands are placed on captured wild turkeys to monitor after release.

HUNTING REGULATIONS



Wild turkey beard is actually modified feather and located on chest of mature males. Photo provided by the National Wild Turkey Federation.

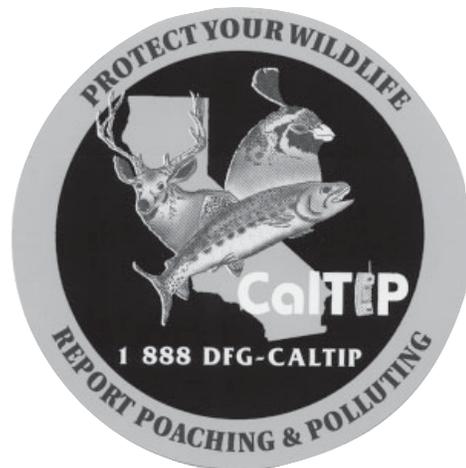
Turkey hunting regulations are established to maximize quality hunting opportunities while preventing the over-harvest of wild turkeys. California has a spring and fall season for hunting turkeys. The fall season, in all counties except San Diego, opens on the second Saturday in November and runs 16 consecutive days. The bag limit and possession limit is one wild turkey (either sex) per fall season. The spring season is statewide, opens the last Saturday in March, and extends for 37 consecutive days. In addition, an archery-only spring season extends for two weeks beyond the close of the general spring season. The bag and possession limit for the spring season (including the archery-only portion) is one bearded wild turkey per day, three per season. A bearded turkey is one that has a beard visible through the breast feathers.

These regulations, like all hunting regulations, are subject to change, and turkey hunters should refer to the current *California Regulations for Resident and Migratory Upland Game Birds* for regulations currently in effect, available on the DFG website at www.dfg.ca.gov.

POACHING AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Wild turkey populations can be heavily impacted by high mortality rates. They are subjected to many forms of natural mortality, like predation. But mortality from poaching, such as beardless hens killed during the spring season, turkeys killed outside the open season, and bag limits exceeded during the open season, can be controlled.

The California State Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the DFG's CalTIP program, offer rewards for information concerning turkey poachers. It is the obligation of every turkey hunter to report poaching. Violations should be reported by calling CalTIP at 1(888) 334-2258. Callers may remain anonymous.



CalTIP: "Californians Turn In Poachers."

HUNTER-LANDOWNER RELATIONS

The future of turkey hunting may depend on relations between landowners and hunters. Most turkey habitat in California is found on private land.

Without considerate and appropriate behavior from hunters wishing to use private land, the landowner may

increasingly exercise his or her right to refuse access to all hunters. The solution to this potential problem is the development and acceptance of a hunter's outdoor ethic, here defined as behavior leading toward a harmonious balance between those who use the land for recreation and those who own it.

ROLE OF THE LANDOWNER AND THE CITIZEN

In California, wildlife is legally the property of all citizens, held in trust for them by the State. Game becomes the property of an individual only when it is taken legally. Public ownership of game has led to a very strong hunting tradition in California and across the United States. Because of this, most hunters have grown up with the belief that hunting is a right instead of a

privilege. Today, hunting is a sport enjoyed by many, regardless of whether they own property.

Many landowners are willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as they ask permission to do so. In California, written landowner permission is required in order to hunt on private land. Acquiring landowner permission before hunting on private land will help present a positive image of hunters, and help build the hunter-landowner relationship.

HUNTER RESPONSIBILITY

Hunter responsibility involves respect for wildlife, respect for the rights of others and concern for the use of the land. Hunting in a responsible manner starts before the hunt when permission for land access is

obtained, during the hunt when game is pursued in an ethical and legal manner, and after the hunt when the landowner is thanked for the privilege of hunting on his or her land.

HUNTING ON PUBLIC LANDS

Finding a place to hunt on public lands requires some homework. It starts with knowing where turkeys are on public lands. In 2003, the DFG and the U.S. Forest Service completed a new map of wild turkey range, shown on page 22. This map includes established range and recently occupied range. Established range is defined as the areas where turkey populations are relatively abundant and have been established for decades. Recently occupied range is the area where turkeys were released over the past 10 years but are not as abundant and their establishment is not certain. Most releases of Merriam's turkeys on higher elevation public lands have not been as successful as the releases of the Rio Grande subspecies in lower elevations. Wild turkey ranges are layered over U.S. Forest Service lands, which make up the largest and most widespread public lands available for turkey hunting. Additionally, some important DFG wildlife areas (as shown on page 21) also provide some turkey hunting opportunity. The more popular areas offer turkey hunting through lottery drawings to provide for a more quality experience early in the season. For more information about how to apply for these hunts, visit the DFG Web site at www.dfg.ca.gov.

The range map provides a general idea of where turkeys are in the state, but finding a location will require more detailed maps. Topographic maps, which include land ownership, are produced by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at 1:100,000 scale for the entire state and by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) at a slightly larger scale for each national forest in the state, 16 of which have turkey populations. These maps can be purchased from BLM at www.ca.blm.gov/caso/iac/maps_pubroom.html and from USFS at www.fsfed.us/maps. Take the time to contact local biologists that have knowledge of where turkeys may be, and make sure that you are aware of any major land ownership changes that may have occurred since the maps were printed. Detailed topographic maps produced by the U.S. Geological Survey at 1:24,000 scale are also available at www.usgs.gov/pubprod/, but they do not contain land ownership. Global Positioning Systems (GPS) units are very popular because of their affordability and utility. GPS units can be used to find exact locations on topographic maps, and record important areas that you may want to relocate.

TURKEY HUNTER SAFETY

Surprisingly, most hunters involved in hunting accidents have many years of hunting experience. When interviewed, they cannot believe that it happened to them. It can happen to you. By being sure of your target and using the defensive measures outlined below, you can help ensure that you have a safe, quality hunt.

All California hunters who have not held a California hunting license in a prior year must successfully pass a hunter education course before purchasing a hunting license, unless they can provide evidence of having received this training in another state. Some prior license holders have taken the course as a refresher, often with their children. Turkey hunting safety depends on most of the principles taught in these courses, but there are many unique aspects of turkey hunting safety that all turkey hunters should also be aware of. The National Rifle Association (NRA) offers a turkey hunter safety education course and publishes the hunter's educational series which includes a book on hunting wild turkey. Contact the NRA for more information.

Most hunting accidents can be prevented. Accidents happen when people disregard firearm safety fundamentals. Prevention involves knowing and obeying basic safety rules. If the three basic rules for handling firearms are followed, most firearm-related tragedies could be prevented.

1. Treat every firearm as if it were loaded.

Always check to make sure the gun is unloaded; never take anyone's word that the gun is unloaded. Check for yourself. Open the action, look, then leave it open. "I didn't know it was loaded" is no excuse.

2. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction.

Experienced hunters always handle a gun safely. They never let the muzzle point at anybody, including themselves. They also insist that everyone follow the same rules.



Prevention is the solution for hunting accidents. Drawing reprinted with permission from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

3. Be sure of your target and beyond.

Responsible hunters are certain of their target before firing. They never shoot at a sound. They never shoot at a patch of color. They never shoot at anything except what they are hunting, and only after they have made a positive identification. They will pass up a great trophy gobbler rather than make a mistake and cause an accident.

You must always be alert when handling firearms and while hunting. However, there are certain times when you must show extra caution:

- 1) **When carrying a firearm in rough terrain or obstacles.** Be sure of your footing and always keep your firearm pointed in a safe direction.
- 2) **When you are tired after a day's hunt.** Reserve enough energy to complete a safe hunt.
- 3) **When you first spot or think you have spotted a turkey.** Do not rush into a careless shot.
- 4) **When hunting companions forget or ignore safety rules.** Immediately bring it to their attention.

CAMOUFLAGE SAFETY

Hunter camouflage is an important part of hunting the wild turkey, but it may present a problem. The better you are camouflaged and concealed, the less likely another hunter will be able to see you.

The proper way to notify an approaching hunter is to calmly and clearly speak to him. **DO NOT move or wave. DO NOT use a turkey call to alert the hunter.** If the other hunter does not respond to your first call, repeat louder to announce that you are near. Not everyone has good hearing; it is paramount in this situation to remain still until recognized by the approaching hunter.

To dress for success and safety, follow these tips from the National Wild Turkey Federation:

1. Never wear clothing that contains the colors red, white, or blue because they can be mistaken for colors found on wild turkeys.
2. Be sure that the accessories you carry that are red, white, or blue (e.g. diaphragm calls, box calls, box call chalk, candy wrappers, apples, etc.), are not visible to other hunters.
3. Camouflage your gun. If not, at least cover up white diamonds or other red or white markings.
4. Always keep your hands and head camouflaged when calling.
5. Wear dark-colored socks and pants that are long enough to keep your skin from being exposed.
6. Do not “over-camouflage” by sitting in vegetation so thick that it obscures your vision.



Full camouflage is important for a safe and successful hunt. Photo courtesy of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

7. If you use an artificial blind of camouflage netting, maintain a clear field of view.

Other safety measures you may wish to consider include: 1) placing a blaze orange band around the tree you sit next to; 2) placing a blaze orange sign “Camouflage Hunter in Area-Be Careful” in your vehicle window; 3) wearing some blaze orange while moving from one spot to another; and 4) showing blaze orange on your decoy, decoy bag and harvested turkey while transporting.

CALLING SITE LOCATION

Calling site selection is very important for both turkey hunting success and safety. You cannot shoot a turkey you cannot see. Moreover, gobblers do not like dense, brushy areas where they cannot see potential trouble from natural predators. Use calling sites where you can see for 75-100 yards. Do not sit near the edge of a hill that you cannot see over; you may be surprised by a hunter.

Sit against a tree, stump or rock wider than your shoulders. Turkey hunting involves making turkey sounds with various devices. Some require movement on the part of the hunter. When shaking a gobbler tube call it may resemble the motion of a gobbling turkey, and in combination with the gobble sound may be misinterpreted by an over-anxious turkey hunter. By choosing a large tree, stump or rock, slight movements will be shielded from view of hunters coming from behind whom you may not detect.

DECOY-RELATED SAFETY

Decoys can be effective for bringing turkeys in close and taking their attention away from you, but caution should be used to avoid dangerous situations. Hunters may stalk your calls, see your decoy, and shoot at the decoy. If you are in line with the decoy you could be in danger.

Follow these defensive hunting tips from the National Wild Turkey Federation:

1. A decoy should never be visible while being transported. Never carry an uncovered (identifiable) decoy.
2. Whenever possible, set up by a tree that is greater in diameter than the width of your shoulders.
3. From your seated position, identify the clearest line of vision in front of you. Establish a “sight line” that allows you 100 yards' visibility. Then set your decoy approximately 20 yards from your position on the line.
4. Should you see another hunter, call out to them in a clear loud voice. Their presence has already compromised your location and an unintelligible response from you may only confuse them, rather than alerting them to your presence.
5. If you are calling over decoys and elect to move to a new location, check carefully to ensure that no one is stalking your decoys. Check before leaving your calling site location. Should you see someone in the area, rule 4 applies.



Decoys can be effective but should be used with caution.

Photo by Karen R. Fothergill.

You may also consider using one of the decoys that incorporate some blaze orange color into the wing and tail feathers.

CONTROLLING YOUR REACTIONS

Always be aware that the mind can sometimes cause a person to “see” what that person wants to see. Hunters may sometimes “see” wildlife when there is none. This ability of the hunter’s mind to “create” a wild animal can be attributed partly to the strong desire to locate and bag game. The moment of high excitement is triggered as soon as a buck, bear, turkey or other game is seen, and it is in that moment of greatest excitement accidents can and do occur. Peer pressure and over-confidence has been shown to play a part in your mental attitude, so reconsider each “opportunity” for a brief second and make sure of your target.

Restrain your reflexes so you do not shoot without thinking. Here are some basic rules:

1. **Never shoot at sounds or movements.** Assume every sound you hear and movement you see is another human being until proven otherwise.
2. **Never shoot at a patch of color.** Positively identify your target as a legal turkey first.
3. **Always positively identify any target before raising your gun; be certain it is legal game.**
4. **Double check before you shoot.** Consider placing a National Wild Turkey Federation “Hunt Safely” sticker on your gun’s receiver to remind you to make absolutely sure of your target.

The Next Time You're Touched By the Beauty of Wildlife, Thank a Hunter.



That's because hunters have funded the most successful wildlife conservation effort in history—over *\$7 billion* generated so far.

More than a half-century ago, hunters responded to the alarming decline in wildlife populations by supporting a tax on the purchase of firearms, ammunition and archery equipment. Congress approved the tax in 1937 through the passage of the Wildlife Restoration Act.

Commonly called the "Pittman-Robertson Program," after its congressional sponsors, the Wildlife Restoration Program places an 11 percent tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment, and a 10 percent tax on handguns. Those funds are given directly to states for wildlife management and research programs, habitat acquisition and hunter education and training.

Thanks to the Wildlife Restoration Program, many species have been restored to healthy numbers, and their habitat will be preserved for future generations.

This message is paid for by hunters ... the original wildlife conservationists.



TURKEY HUNTING TECHNIQUES

BASIC TECHNIQUES

Although turkeys have certain patterns of behavior, turkey hunting is challenging because wild turkeys are extremely wary and are not totally predictable. Your success will depend on your selection of an area with good turkey numbers, your abilities to use your equipment, your willingness to adapt your hunting techniques to changing situations, your persistence, and a little bit of luck.

SCOUTING

The first step in turkey hunting is to scout the woods before the season opens. Turkeys frequent certain areas and will use them year after year if the habitat does not

change. A good time to scout in the spring is a week or two before the season, especially if the weather has turned warm which can trigger winter flock break-up and calling by gobblers. Your objective in scouting should be to identify those areas that turkeys frequent. These areas include roosting sites, feeding sites and strutting areas. Look for turkeys and turkey signs such as tracks, feathers, scratchings, dustings, and droppings. Look for dusting areas with tracks in them or roost trees with droppings and feathers under them. In dry areas, search around water sources for turkey tracks.

If you spend enough time scouting, you will become very familiar with the area and may be able to determine regular movement patterns of the flock. The best times to



Photo courtesy of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Turkey tracks.

look or listen for turkeys include the early morning hours from one-half hour before sunrise until mid-morning, and late in the evening as the turkeys go to roost. Although gobblers may roost or strut in many different areas, you will learn the locations they use most often.

If you do not hear gobblers calling, try a crow call, owl call, shock call or predator call in early morning or just before dark. Gobblers will often respond, giving away their location. This is an effective way to locate roosting sites for spring turkey hunting.

While scouting, pay close attention to large trees that you may want to sit next to while hunting. Use this time to roughly measure distances for shooting zones. Also note the location of fences, ravines, dense brush or streams that may keep a gobbler from coming to your call during the season.

If possible, visit the area you will hunt a day or two prior to hunting. This will familiarize you with the land, and you can determine whether turkeys are still using the areas where you saw them earlier.

PLANNING

For fall or spring turkey hunting trips, use the information gathered during scouting trips to plan your hunting strategy before entering the field. Having a well-planned trip can mean the difference between an enjoyable and successful hunt or a disaster. A good safety precaution is to leave your hunting plan, including your location and estimated time of return, with someone at home.

If you have put a gobbler to roost the night before, you will know exactly where to set up in the morning.



CALLING TURKEYS

The most effective way to get within shotgun distance of a spring gobbler is to call him by reproducing the sounds a hen makes. These hen sounds can be made with your voice or with some type of turkey calling device.

Commercially available turkey calls fall into two broad categories: friction calls, which produce sound by rubbing two surfaces together; and mouth calls, through which air is inhaled or exhaled. One other type of call, a shaker, produces gobbles when you shake it in a rapid motion.

The easiest calls to master are the friction calls (for example, box, peg and slate, peg and glass, or push button). The major disadvantage is that you cannot hold a shotgun and work them at the same time. This is important because you may spook your wild bird when you put the call down and raise the shotgun. A second disadvantage is that most calls do not always work well if they get wet. Placing the friction calls in a loose plastic bag will allow you to operate them during wet conditions.



Turkey hunters use a box call to call in a gobbler.
Photo courtesy of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Diaphragm mouth calls are popular among hunters. They are the most versatile calls but require more practice. They are unaffected by wet weather, allow the hunter to use both hands freely, and can be used without making any discernable movement. Two other types of calls, the turpin call and the tube call, produce realistic calls, but require hand movement in order to operate.

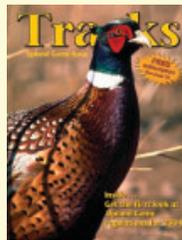
Shaker calls are the only ones specifically designed to produce realistic-sounding gobbles. No practice is necessary; the sound is the same each time you shake them. They produce only the gobbler sound and are not usually considered a requirement for successful turkey hunting.

The type of call used is less important than how well the hunter masters calling techniques. The best ways to learn turkey calling are to listen to live turkeys, an instructional tape, and/or an experienced turkey hunter. Turkeys have more than two dozen different calls, but the hunter will rarely notice more than about 10. There are 10 basic sounds the hunter should be able to recognize. Listed below are these sounds and how to use them.

Tree yelp. This is the first turkey sound heard in the morning. It is a slow, soft, nasal sound, consisting of three or four yelps made only at daybreak from the roost. It is made when turkeys are just becoming visible in trees. It is a greeting call to make sure that all is well after a dark night of not seeing or hearing one another. This call can only be heard on still mornings in a roosting area.

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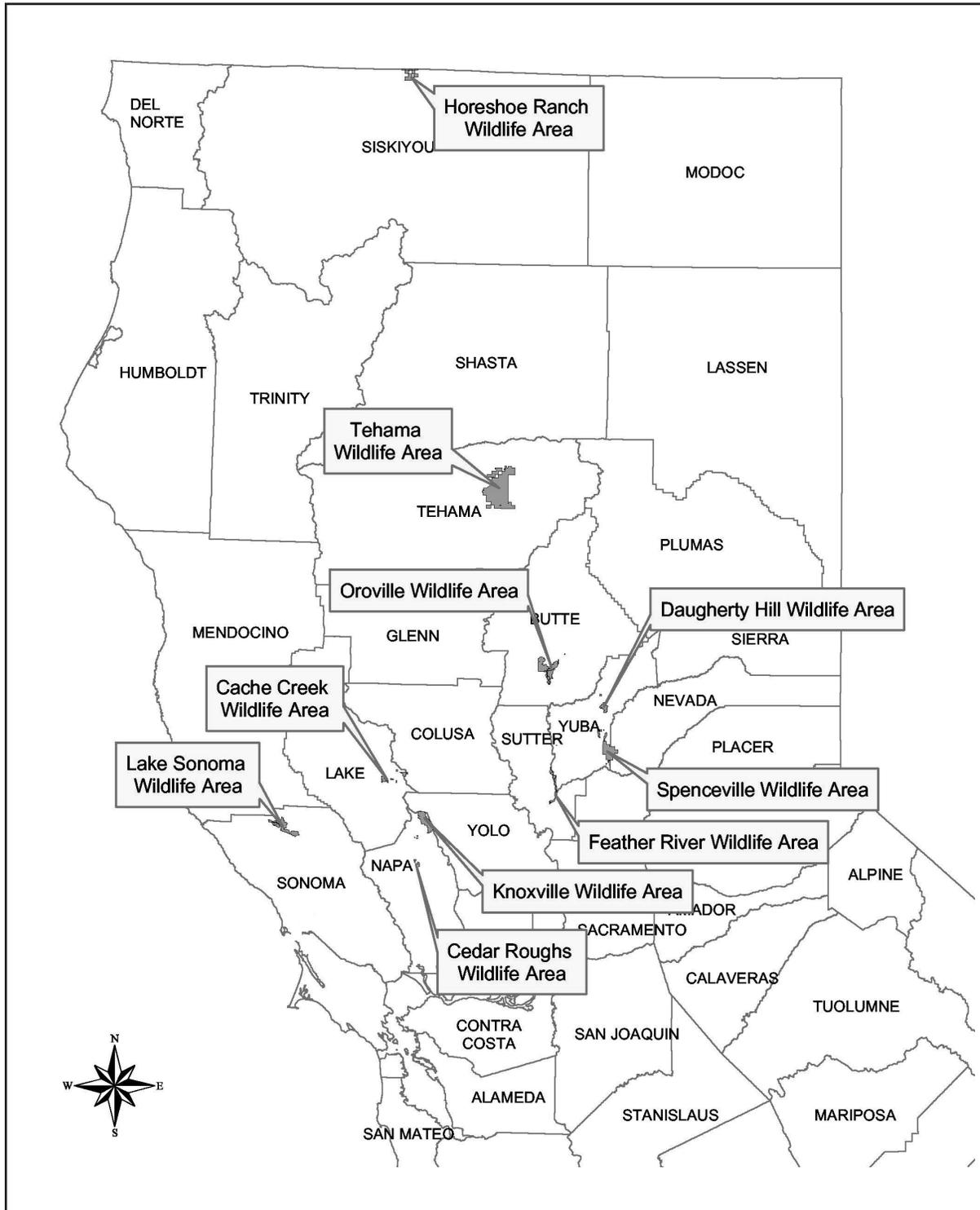
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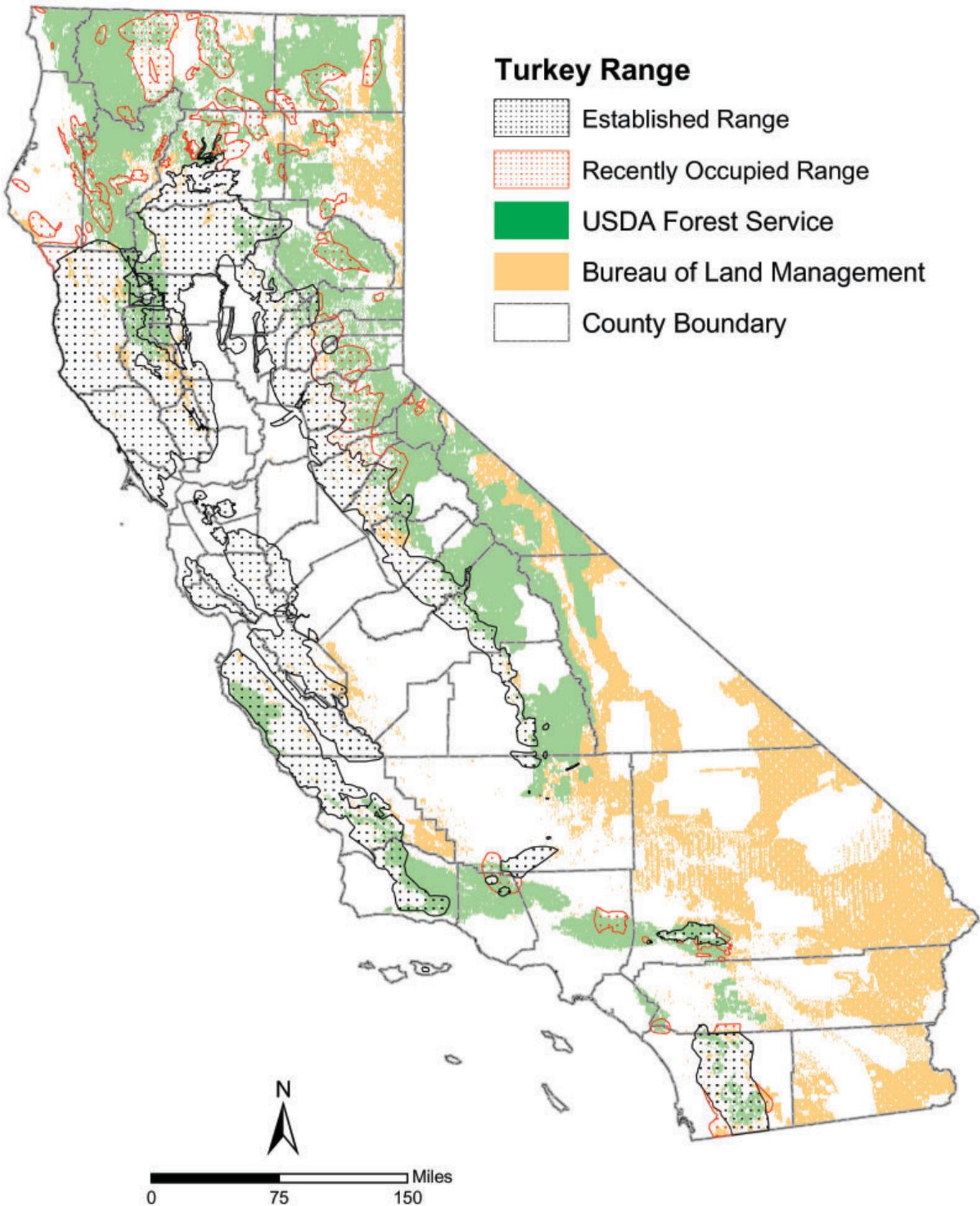
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WILD TURKEY RANGE 2003



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 **Field Offices**



Lands and Facilities Branch
12/19/2001

Tree yelps should be the first call made by a turkey hunter who has set up near a roosted turkey. This is where scouting really pays off.

Plain Yelp. The plain yelp is the one sound most people associate with turkeys. Turkeys use this sound to communicate with distant birds. The yelp is made by all turkeys in the fall, winter, and spring. A yelp from a gobbler is lower pitched, more coarse, and less musical than from a hen. The plain yelp is best used routinely throughout the morning while hunting. Plain yelps are usually done in a series of two to five in a row and always have a very even rhythm. Plain yelps will evoke a response from a spring gobbler and call him in if he is of a mind to come. It is the standard call when working a spring gobbler. Some hunters use it successfully with an occasional cluck.

Cluck. The cluck has several meanings. The sound is a short, soft, single-syllable, non-musical tone. It is used to gain another turkey's attention. If used too loudly it will alarm turkeys. It can be used in the following manner: "cluck (pause briefly), cluck, cluck (pause), cluck (pause), cluck (pause), cluck, cluck." Its major use is to evoke an answering cluck from any nearby turkey. It works well because turkeys are curious about any other turkey



Diaphragm mouth calls and case.

sound. Some successful hunters use an occasional cluck with the plain yelp in this manner: "cluck (pause), yelp, yelp (pause), cluck, cluck (pause), yelp, yelp, yelp."

Purr. The purr is a soft call used by turkeys when communicating to each other. Hunters often use purrs with clucks when gobblers are in close but not quite close enough.



Wooden box call and case.

Putt. This is a short, sharp, loud cluck. It sounds very familiar to the cluck, only the cluck is softer and less distinct. It will not call in turkeys, but you should know the call when you hear it, because it is the worst sound a calling hunter can make. It is the alarm call of the turkey, and generally will be the last call you hear before a turkey departs.

Cackle. A cackle is an excited call of a hen and is often emitted when flying down from a roost. It is usually a series of 12 or more yelps which rise abruptly in pitch and cadence and then gradually decline in pitch and cadence. Often the yelps are very short and staccato.

Cut. A cut is a short, staccato yelp and is usually emitted by the hen in a series varying in length and cadence. It is often used by an aggravated hen as she defends her nesting territory from other hens, but it will often excite a gobbler.

Kee kee run. This is a call made by a lost young turkey trying to reassemble with its fall flock. It is a high-pitched "kee kee kee" followed by a short, raspy yelp or two.

Hen assembly. This call is made by an adult hen to gather her flock. It is a long series of yelps rising in volume and pitch and then declining. The series may be as long as 15-20 yelps.

Gobble. The gobble has limited use and affects turkeys in two ways: hens hear a potential mate and gobblers hear a potential rival. Gobblers may investigate other gobbling in their vicinity and may fight uninvited gobblers. The gobble call will sometimes help you locate a gobbler but may not bring him into shotgun range.

Extreme caution should be used when using a gobble call as it may attract other hunters into your calling territory, and you may find yourself being hunted by another turkey hunter. For that reason gobbles are not recommended while hunting but can be effective to locate roosting birds in the evening.

Beginners should keep several points in mind. It is better to call too softly than too loudly, to call too rarely than too frequently, and to perfect one or two calls rather than attempt some sound not yet mastered. Timing, or rhythm, can be more important than the actual quality of sound. Finally, remember that no two turkeys sound alike and what works on one gobbler might send the next one in another direction. If a gobbler will not respond to your call, change or vary your current calling technique.

CAMOUFLAGE

A wild turkey's eyesight is estimated to be about 10 times better than a human's. In addition, turkeys can distinguish color to some degree and are quick to spot unnatural colors in their environment. For this reason, turkey hunters should avoid clothing that will draw attention to them.

The best camouflage clothing is both protective and comfortable. Many hunters make the mistake of camouflaging everything except their face and hands. This is a serious mistake because the face and hands reflect light, and they are the body parts a hunter is most likely to move. Face masks, gloves, and camouflage make-up are most frequently used to camouflage the face and hands. Face masks can obscure vision, cause glasses to fog, and lead to over-heating. Facial greases tend to run if you get hot. Some new models of face masks have provisions for fitting around the frames of glasses, and are less likely to



Gobble tube shaker call.

cause glasses to fog. Every hunter is different, and like most equipment, trial and error is the only means of determining the best combination.

Gun camouflage is also important because the gun barrel may reflect light. Camouflage tape and camouflage spray paint work well to mask a gun's reflective parts. There are camouflage paints available for guns that can be removed after the turkey season is over.

FIREARMS AND PATTERNING

There is considerable difference of opinion on shotgun ammunition for turkey hunting. But there is no argument that the wild turkey is hard to bring down, and



Turkey George scratch box (left) and double push pin call (right).

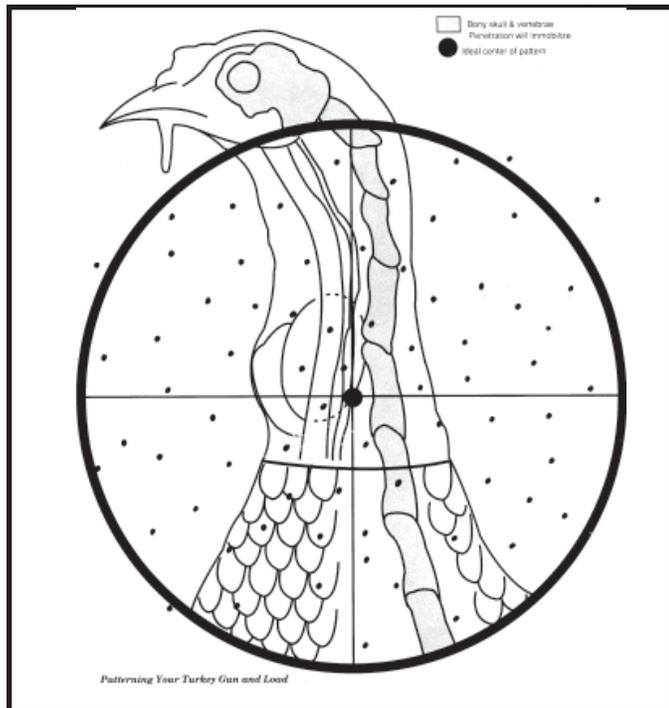
hunters have a responsibility to use loads appropriate for quick and humane kills.

Most experienced turkey hunters agree that the best turkey loads are 12 gauge 2¾-inch or 3-inch magnums of No. 4, 5, or 6 shot. The 10-gauge 3½-inch magnum is increasing in popularity, because it can provide a few extra yards of range. Because of the small target, dense patterns which deliver most of the shot into the head and neck region are preferred. For this reason, full-choke barrels are used in most turkey guns.

A scope, open sights or rear bead are additions to your shotgun which might improve your aim.

A new turkey hunter, or an old turkey hunter with a new shotgun, should spend some preseason time patterning his/her gun with various size shot to pick the best load for the gun. There are two important factors related to the way your shotgun shoots. What is the effective killing range of your gun and how many shot- will strike the vital neck and head region at various ranges?

You should test your gun with both standard and magnum loads. Some shotguns shoot better patterns with standards loads than they do with magnums. A person can make their own targets, purchase life-size turkey targets, or make copies of the turkey target inside this guide.



Turkey target shot pattern. Diagram courtesy of the National Rifle Association.

Place these targets at 20, 30 and 40 yards and shoot each size shell at each target. The objective is to check your aiming point first and secondly to check your pattern on the target. You should do all your shooting from a sitting position as if you were turkey hunting. This will give you practice in judging actual turkey size at the various ranges and improve your aiming skills that will guarantee a quick, clean kill.

EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

You may wish to use the following checklist to make sure that you are not forgetting to take something on your next hunting trip. Not all items are necessary, but all may be useful.

Basic:

- Hunting license
- Upland Game Bird Stamp
- Shotgun/full choke
- Shotgun shells
- Camo day pack
- Camo gloves
- Camo coat
- Camo hat
- Camo face mask
- Seat cushion
- Decoy
- Turkey calls
- Chalk
- Water
- Snacks
- Knife
- Toilet paper
- Compass
- Maps
- Insect repellent
- Small first aid kit

Optional:

- Rain gear
- Binoculars
- Camera
- Range finder
- Radio
- Cell phone
- GPS
- Flashlight
- Matches
- Ratcheting pruners
- Locator calls
- Sandpaper
- Decoy bag
- Turkey sling
- Turkey scale
- Zip-close bags
- Camo make-up/remover
- Private landowner permission slip
- Hunter orange flagging
- Turkey hunting vest
- Archery equipment

SPRING HUNTING TECHNIQUES

One successful technique that can greatly improve a turkey hunter's chance of locating a bird is "putting a gobbler to bed." During the early evening on the day before you are going to hunt, position yourself on a ridge or at the mouth of a canyon. Take out a crow call, owl call, gobbler call or a predator call and give a call. If a gobbler answers, try to pinpoint his location, noting the prominent features where the gobble seemed to come from. If time allows, move to another location and repeat this procedure. Get up early the following morning, well before sunrise, and sneak to within 100-150 yards of the gobbler's roost tree at about the same elevation. You should be in place at least one hour before sunrise.

If you were unable to locate a roosted gobbler the night before, try again early the morning of your hunt. Listen for a gobbler when it gets light enough for song birds to begin singing, which is well before sunrise. If there are no gobblers calling, try to shock one into gobbling with a loud owl hoot or crow call. It is not advisable to use turkey sounds until you are concealed and ready. If you do not hear a gobbler, you should move to another area, watching for strutting gobblers, listening for gobblers, and trying shock calls to locate a gobbler. Do not sit all morning at one spot unless you are confident that gobblers frequent the area.

Determining the exact location of a gobbler can be difficult. The distance the gobble can be heard and

direction from which the sound seems to come are influenced by topography, wind direction and velocity, the direction that the gobbler is facing, and the extent that the new green foliage is out. Heavy foliage can act as a sound barrier.

In most of the blue oak/grasslands and black oak/conifer habitats, turkeys roost in oaks below the ridge lines and out of the prevailing winds. If you hear a turkey gobbling from a roost site, remember that it is easier to call a gobbler up a hill than down one. In addition, if you try calling from too far away he might not respond, especially if he has a hen nearby.

After locating a roosting bird, try to get within 100-150 yards in a suitable location to begin calling. Choose a calling site very carefully, as this will probably be the most important decision of the day's hunt. Try to pick a spot that a turkey will most likely go, such as west of the roost where the gobbler can approach the site with the sun at his back. Keep in mind that gobblers like to show off to their hens, so a clearing that catches rays of the rising sun is a good bet for early morning calling. Also, make it easy for the gobbler to get to your calling location. Do not expect him to wade through thick brush or cross a fence or creek. Choose a site such as a large tree or rock where you have good visibility in all directions. It is critical to set up so that you are able to see the gobbler, identify your target, and have a clear shot. Start calling softly after legal

shooting hours begin. A good first call is the "tree-yelp." This tells the gobbler that a hen is roosting nearby. When the gobbler hears it, he will often gobble back. When this happens, stop calling and get in position. Generally, within the next 10-15 minutes, you will either see or hear him. You may be able to hear him fly down, and his gobbles usually sound farther away once he is on the ground. If he is within sight do not call or he might see you. If you give him time, chances are he will work right up to you. If you have positioned yourself up against a big tree or rock, wait until he is well within 40 yards before you shoot.

If after about 10 minutes the gobbler does not answer your "tree-yelp," try a series of plain yelps and



Setting up a decoy before the hunt. Photo courtesy of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

clucks. It may be that the gobbler you “put to bed” last night has already assembled with a group of hens. In this case, listen for gobbles and yelps. Remember that if a gobbler is already with some hens he may not gobble much and may not be interested in your calls. Aggressive calling to the hens can sometimes bring both the hens and the gobbler to you. If the birds are far away, move as quickly and quietly as possible to a place where the bird can be called.

Once in place try clucking and purring. Sometimes the gobbler will come right away; other times he will wait, expecting the hen to come to him. If he does not come after five minutes and you know he is still in the area, try a few soft yelps, clucks and/or purrs. If your gobbler is still in the area but has not come to your call, try other calls such as a “cut” or “cackle” or any type of call that excites him to try to bring him into range. Sometimes aggressive calling will work, other times soft, infrequent



Gobbler and hen decoys. Photo by Karen R. Fothergill.

calling works better. Experiment with your own techniques.

Many hunters use a decoy to entice a gobbler into gun range and draw his attention away from them. Hunters who use decoys will experience a variety of results. Some gobblers will fight with or try to mount decoys. Others will strut for hours around a fake hen. Yet, other turkeys will run in the other direction or hesitate when they first spot a decoy.

If you can tell that a gobbler is moving away, one option is to try to get to where he is headed. If the gobbler is moving back and forth along a ridge or a fence,

you may be able to move to a site along his track while he is at the farthest point from you. But, if you move too often, sooner or later you will find that the gobbler is where you just moved from. It often pays to stay in one location for at least 45 minutes to an hour.

When a gobbler does come toward you, have your gun ready before he comes into view. You may want to rest your elbows on your knees while holding your gun. You can lift your gun when a turkey walks behind a large tree, but watch for other turkeys with the gobbler that may see you move. Once a gobbler is in an open area in front of you, movement of your gun will send him flying or running, leaving you without a shot. Wait to see if the gobbler turns away while strutting, causing his tail to block his view of you. This is the time to move.

Do not shoot while a gobbler is in full strut. A good opportunity is when he gobbles and his head and neck are held up away from his body. If you are ready to shoot, a cluck on a mouth call will often bring the gobbler out of a strut. Shoot immediately when the gobbler’s head is raised. When using a shotgun, as opposed to a bow, the head and neck are the only killing shots you have on a turkey, so make sure you have a clear shot at them before you squeeze the trigger.

When you shoot a turkey, immediately move toward the downed bird. Many times a turkey will only be stunned and will regain his senses and try to escape. By moving toward the bird you can cut the distance for a second shot if needed, or physically subdue the bird. Placing a knee on top of the bird and breaking its neck is a good technique. Use caution if you grab for the legs, because the spurs of the gobbler have injured many hunters.

If your hunt does not go as expected, you are not alone. That is the challenge of turkey hunting. Keep trying. Persistent, patient hunters are the most successful.

Turkey hunting is one of the finest woodland sports. The attraction is not based primarily on harvesting a wild turkey, but rather on the manner in which it is taken. Whether you carry a gun, a bow or a camera, few types of hunting in California require as much knowledge of animal behavior as locating a gobbler and then successfully calling him to you. For those who have experienced it, the spring turkey hunt is often their favorite.

FALL HUNTING TECHNIQUES

There has been a fall wild turkey hunting season in California since 1968. The fall turkey hunt is for either sex, and hunting techniques are quite different from a spring gobbler hunt. One of the more successful techniques is to locate and break up a fall brood flock, position yourself where they were, and call them back. Locating a brood flock often requires a great deal of time. However, local hunters and DFG personnel can assist hunters with information on flock locations. Large brood flocks, which are made up of hens and their young of the year, leave sign similar to that of spring turkeys, but on a larger scale. Look for tracks, droppings and the tell-tale feeding areas with oak leaves scratched in lines. Fall brood flocks are quite vocal, so listen for turkey talk as you scout for the flock.

Once a flock is located, a good break-up of the flock is mandatory for a successful hunt with this technique. Many hunters rush the flock, shouting and waving their arms to startle the flock into scattering. Remember, do not run with a loaded gun in your hands. In many turkey ranges in California, the rocky terrain makes it dangerous to run at the flocks. A well-trained dog can be used to break up the flock, but must be hidden in a blind during the hunt or removed from the hunt area.

After you have broken up the flock, locate a calling site near the point of the break up. Wait about one-half hour or until you hear birds calling before you start to call them.

The most frequently used call in the fall is the “kee kee run” or lost bird call. It is a high pitched “kee kee kee” in a series, usually followed by a yelp or two. Young birds will “kee kee” frantically and try to locate each other a short time after you have broken up the flock. By responding to this sound you can get them to approach within shooting range.

Another call to try if the “kee kee run” is unsuccessful is a hen assembly call. This is the call of an adult hen gathering her flock. It is a long series of yelps rising slightly in volume and pitch and then declining in volume and pitch. Hens will often use a series of 15 to 20 yelps for a gathering call. This will often lure a young bird within shooting range.

A technique for locating fall flocks is to locate a roost by listening for soft yelps and birds flying into trees the



Successful fall turkey hunter. DFG file photo.

evening before your hunt. If you can locate a roost, this flock can usually be scattered at day break. It is also possible to scatter roosting birds after shooting hours the night before in the same way you would during the day. This will separate the flock during the night, and reassembly will take place the next morning.

Hunters have also had success calling gobblers and hens by locating their flock and reproducing calls they are making. Often a gobbler flock will approach a coarse gobbler yelp to investigate the intruder. Another technique worth trying if you are working adults without young is to reproduce their call exactly and add more aggressive calls after each series. Successful fall gobbler hunting is difficult and requires a great deal of patience and knowledge.

SPECIAL BOW HUNTING CONSIDERATIONS

For a growing number of California hunters, hunting turkeys with bow and arrow is an exciting and challenging sport. Hunting gobblers in the spring or flocks of young birds in the fall is considered the ultimate challenge by most experienced archers. Turkey hunting success is possible if attention is paid to equipment, blinds, use of decoys, shot placement, and recovery techniques.

Hunting with bow and arrow presents some unique challenges:

Movement required to shoot the bow must be hidden from the keen eyesight of the turkeys.

The vital area on a turkey is very small (3-4 inches in diameter) and proper shot placement is critical.

Recovery of wounded turkeys is difficult, but can be aided by using special equipment.

EQUIPMENT

Turkeys have excellent color vision, and therefore all equipment should be camouflaged or of a dark color. Brightly-colored arrow fletchings can give you away unless you are inside a full-coverage ground blind.



Most successful hunters use high-let-off compounds. Compound bows are a good choice because they shoot very flat and require less strength to hold at full draw. For those hunters who choose to hunt without the aid of a full-covered ground blind, a better choice may be a fast-shooting recurve or long bow. A quick shot is possible with the instinctive style of shooting used by many traditional archery hunters. Bow draw weights from 45 to 75 pounds are adequate for hunting wild turkey.

Broadhead selection for turkey hunting is a hotly debated issue. Despite the claims of proponents of dull, specially designed or expanding blade broadheads or blunts, most experienced turkey hunters use sharp, wide-cutting broadheads. Washers or other feather-grabbing devices behind the broadhead are not necessary. Advocates of the special broadheads or stopper devices claim that more shock will be created if the arrow stays in the birds, making recovery easier. Recovery depends more on where the turkey was hit than on whether or not the arrow stays in. Many arrows that hit a turkey will stay in without the aid of one of these special devices, because turkeys are heavily muscled and thickly boned.

Since a turkey is a small target, accessories that improve accuracy are recommended. These include bow and peep sights, shooting tabs, and releases. Use bright-colored or fluorescent sight pins or paint dull-colored pins white. This way, they will show up brightly against the dark colors of a turkey.

A turkey's hearing is good, so eliminate any noisy bow accessories or moving parts. Lubricate wheels on compound bows, put moleskin around the arrow rest, quiet squeaky limbs and tighten up any screws, bolts or other noise-making components.

BLINDS AND TREE STANDS

Bow hunters suffer a major obstacle to making good, clean shots at wary, nervous turkeys. Turkeys

Successful bow hunter with long beard. Photo by Rodger Benadom.

have keen eyesight and will detect the movement required to draw and shoot a bow, especially at close bow ranges. A bow hunter who hunts without a blind has a poor chance for success. Using a blind is the only consistent way to get close shots at undisturbed turkeys.

There are two major types of blinds—ground and elevated. Ground blinds are the best and are either portable or constructed with brush and vegetation. Sharp-eyed turkeys constantly scan trees for signs of danger from above. This means that you will be seen in a tree stand even if you do not move. Tree stands have other disadvantages, such as the permanent-type stands used for deer which are often in poor locations for turkey hunting. Portable stands can be used, but the noise and general commotion involved in erecting one may spook turkeys.

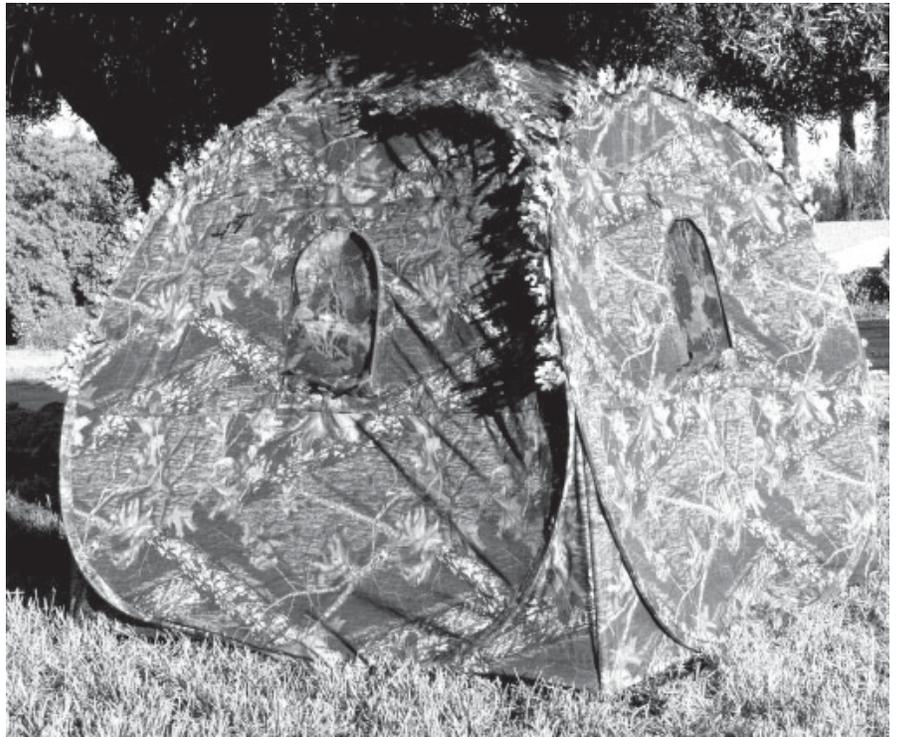
Blind location is critical. In the fall, this should be within 30 yards of the point where you scattered a flock. In the spring, precise location is not as important, but good strutting areas, roost sites, or feeding areas are best.

DECOY TACTICS

Turkeys either love or hate decoys depending on their mood and the time of year. Spring gobblers can often be enticed into close bow range with a decoy. Members of fall flocks are not always as easily fooled.

Most experienced bow hunters use a hen decoy. Positioning a decoy is important. If your decoy is too far away, say 25 yards, and a turkey comes in on the far side and sees it at 20 yards, the bird may hang up. Then it is out of range at 45 yards. For maximum effectiveness, place a decoy no more than 10 yards away.

Some hunters use more than one hen decoy, a jake decoy, or a small flock of decoys. The theory is that a turkey will be enticed to join up with the flock or a gobbler may be enraged at the presence of a jake. These tactics do not always work. Seasoned bow hunters occasionally report watching gobblers ignore jake decoys and fight hen decoys. Several decoys provide added opportunity for a turkey to see something interesting, but it also increases safety problems. Most hunters use only one hen decoy.



An archery style blind will also accommodate a wheelchair-dependent hunter. Photo by Karen R. Fothergill.

SHOT PLACEMENT

The best shot is one that breaks the turkey's backbone or spine. This will immediately immobilize it. For the best chance to hit the spine, wait until the bird is standing erect with its back toward you. Aim for the middle of the back. If the turkey is feeding or walking with its head down, the moving spine presents a difficult target. A turkey with its head down can be made to stand erect by making one or two clucks with your call.

A hit in the neck is equally effective, but the neck is small and difficult to hit consistently. An attempt at a neck shot will either kill the bird instantly or miss it completely.

If the turkey is facing you, an arrow placed four inches below the base of the neck is good. This will be approximately an inch below where the beard is attached on a male turkey. The arrow should break the back as it exits the body, and should cause damage to the heart or lungs, or break a wing or leg.

A broadside shot can be good if you hit the point where the wing connects to the turkey's body, just below the spine. This is a relatively high position on the body. This will break a wing or the spine, or pierce the heart or lungs.

COMPARISON OF VARIOUS RECOVERY SYSTEMS

Recovery System	Advantages	Disadvantages
String Trackers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Direct tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • String may break • Can affect arrow flight
Heat-sensing Detector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent operation than a few yards away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not detect a turkey more • Higher cost
Audible Tone Arrows	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective to several hundred yards and for many hours • Moderate cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrow may not stay in turkey • Higher cost
Arrows with Radio Transmitters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct tracking at longer ranges • Effective for many hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrow may not stay in turkey • Higher cost

Shooting a strutting gobbler is risky business because his feathers are puffed up, making the location of a vital area difficult to determine. Make a cluck or two to bring the gobbler out of strut. Sometimes a gobbler will not come out of strut. In these situations, the best opportunity for a vital hit is when he turns his fanned tail toward you. Aim at the vent or base of the tail. Your arrow should hit the heart, lungs, or liver and may also break a leg or wing.

Be sure to target practice in the position that you will most likely be hunting. Shooting from a sitting position is very different, and more difficult, than from a standing position.

TURKEY RECOVERY

Bow hunters are often faced with the problem of trying to recover a bird that was hit in a non-vital area. A turkey that is not immobilized when hit is difficult to recover. Wounded turkeys will instantly fly or run away, even with an arrow in them. There is usually no blood trail, no trail of feathers and no tracks to follow.

Fortunately, there are products that will help a bow hunter recover turkeys. String trackers, heat-sensing detectors, arrows with audible tones, and arrows that contain small radio transmitters are all examples of effective recovery systems.

A bird hit in the spine will collapse immediately. An arrow that pierced the heart or lungs, without breaking a leg or wing, may require you to do a little searching. A similar hit that breaks a leg or wing will generally result in a quick recovery.

A wounded bird that runs or flies away should be pursued immediately, keeping it within sight or within hearing. Listen for the sounds of the bird running in the leaves or the flapping of its heavy wings. Regardless of the situation, you should try to mark the direction of flight or run. If you heard a turkey make a crash-landing, pinpoint the location.

Wounded turkeys will normally find a hiding spot within 200 yards. They will hide almost anywhere. You may find them in brush piles, under or by a log, in a creek bed, under leaves or bushes, in tall grass, under rock out-croppings or up against the base of a large tree or rock. Unless it is obviously dead, shoot another arrow into a wounded bird to anchor it.

MISCELLANEOUS

SCORING TROPHIES

Any turkey is a magnificent bird and is considered to be a trophy. However, some hunters like to compare their gobblers with others taken within their state or other states. The National Wild Turkey Federation developed a turkey trophy scoring system that would allow all gobblers to be compared against each other equitably. The scoring system is based upon three measurements—weight, beard length(s) and spur lengths.

The formula for overall score is: weight (lbs. and oz.), plus 10 times spur lengths (right & left), plus two times the beard length. All measurements are recorded in sixteenths of an inch. Weight must be measured to the nearest ounce (for example, 22 lbs. 3 oz. = $22 \frac{3}{16}$ points). Spurs must be measured along the outside center, from the point at which the spur protrudes from the scaled leg skin to the tip of the spur (for example, left

spur 1 inch plus right spur $1 \frac{1}{16}$ inches times 10 = $20 \frac{10}{16}$ points). Beard length is measured from the center point of the protrusion from the skin to the end of the longest bristle (for example $12 \frac{2}{16}$ inches times 2 = $24 \frac{4}{16}$ points). Turkeys with multiple beards must have each beard measured and recorded separately. The total score for the turkey in the example would be $22 \frac{3}{16} + 20 \frac{10}{16} + 24 \frac{4}{16} = 67 \frac{1}{16}$.

Weights must be from certified scales with a current seal from the Division of Weights and Measures, State Department of Agriculture. Pictures are required for the measurements of the spurs and the beard. In addition, the scores must be witnessed. To register your turkey, write Entry Rules & Application, National Wild Turkey Federation, P.O. Box 530, Edgefield, SC, 29824-0530 or telephone (803) 637-3106.

TROPHY MOUNTS

Many hunters will want to have all or part of their turkey mounted. The most common mounts are those with the tail and beard displayed. The beard needs no special treatment to be displayed. The tail fan should be spread out and pinned to cardboard or Styrofoam. Sprinkle salt or borax on the fleshy parts. Allow the tail fan to dry for several weeks and they will remain fanned out. To protect your turkey mount from moths, rub borax into the feathers. Tail fans, wings and/or beards can be displayed by mounting one or all pieces on a wooden plaque. To reduce the rate of fading, do not display your mounted bird in direct sunlight or fluorescent light.

If you are considering a full-body mount, extra care in the field is required. Most taxidermists would prefer that you not field dress the bird, and may even charge extra if there was improper field care. If possible, bring the ungutted bird to the taxidermist the day it is shot. If the weather is warm, you will want to make sure the bird is kept cool until you can take it to the taxidermist. If you must field dress the turkey, be very careful to not to get blood on the feathers. Laying the bird on its back and sprinkling corn meal liberally on the cut as it is being

made will help to soak up excess blood. You may also want to stuff paper towel or cotton inside the mouth, nostrils, and shot holes to soak up any blood.



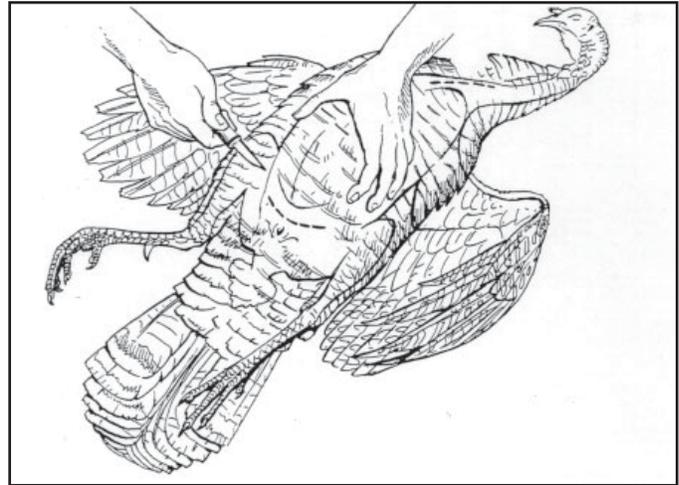
*Full body turkey mount.
Photo by
Karen R.
Fothergill.*

FIELD DRESSING AND CLEANING

Field dressing your bird allows the body to cool down as fast as possible. However, if you wish to document the weight, you should have your turkey weighed on a certified scale before you dress it. In any situation, it is important that you cool down the bird as fast as possible. Careless handling of wild game can result in spoilage.

Turkeys that are not going to be mounted should be field dressed like any other upland game bird. This is done by cutting just above the cloaca to the brisket and removing the entrails. The heart, liver and gizzard should be separated from the entrails. Cut open the gizzard and remove the inner lining while it is warm. If you want to save these three organs, they should be placed in a zip-close plastic bag and cooled immediately.

You can clean turkeys much like you do ducks, geese, grouse and pheasants. The advantage to plucking is that you leave the skin on which keeps the bird from drying out in the freezer and while being cooked. Plucking turkeys in the field after field dressing is easier when the carcass is warm, and all wing and tail feathers can be removed by hand. When the carcass is cold, dipping the bird in scalding water helps feather removal.



Skinning a turkey is cleaner and faster, but the meat may dry out when cooked. To keep the turkey from drying, cook it in foil or in a baking bag. Covering the bird's breast with strips of bacon during cooking will also reduce drying.

THE FINAL REWARD

How do you cook turkey?

Wild turkeys taste like their domestic cousins, but they tend to be less moist and have smaller breasts than store-bought turkeys. Three excellent cooking methods to retain the natural juices are:

1. Cook in a kettle-style barbeque according to manufacturer's directions for domestic turkey (approximately 12 minutes per pound). Requires less time than oven roasting.
2. Roast in a commercial "brown-in-bag" according to manufacturer's directions for domestic turkey.
3. Deep fry in oil according to manufacturer's directions for domestic turkey. Requires less time than BBQ.

Quick & Easy: Remove legs, thighs, and wings and boil for stock. Partially freeze the breast and slice into 1/4 inch slices. Dip slices in egg batter, roll in flour, cornmeal, or cracker crumbs, add seasonings and dry in medium hot butter or margarine for two minutes on each side. Add remaining carcass to stock.

Granny's Turkey Soup

- 1 turkey carcass, giblets and neck
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- Water to cover carcass
- 3 large carrots, sliced
- 3/4 cup barley
- 3 stalks celery, sliced
- 1 large can of tomatoes, drained
- 1/4 cup chopped parsley

In a large pot, prepare turkey stock by covering the turkey carcass, giblets and neck with water. Simmer until carcass falls apart and a rich broth results. Strain broth from bones, remove remaining meat and set aside. Add barley and simmer for half the directed cooking time. Add sliced carrots and cook with barley for about ten minutes. Cut up canned tomatoes and add to soup with celery, left over turkey meat and onions. Simmer until all vegetables are cooked but not soft, add chopped parsley and serve.

GUIDE TO WILD TURKEY ROASTING METHODS AND COOKING TIMES

If you are fortunate enough to obtain a wild turkey, you do not want to make any mistakes about preparing it. Since this game bird is not fat like a domestic store-bought turkey, you will want to guard against overcooking and drying it out. Place a meat thermometer in the turkey thigh and consider the turkey done at 180°. Plan on oven-roasting the bird for approximately 18-20 minutes to the pound.

Rub the turkey inside and out with lemon juice, then salt and pepper it.

Stuff the body cavity including the neck-breast area, sew up the cavity, and rub the turkey all over with softened butter.

Put turkey on a rack in a shallow roasting pan, cover with a loose foil tent and roast at 350°, basting with the pan fat and juices and/or with pan juices and white wine. Remove foil tent for last 30 minutes of roasting.

Amount of wild turkey per person	Roast, stuffed:	Temp/Time
1 - 1½ lb.	8 lb.	350° 2½ hours
	10 lb.	350° 3 hours
	12 lb.	350° 3¾ hours
	15 lb.	350° 4½ hours
	20 lb.	350° 4-6 hours

Smoked Turkey Pitas

- ½ cup celery, chopped
- ½ cup bell pepper, chopped
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- ¾ cup grapes, halved, or pineapple chunks
- ¼ cup parsley, chopped
- ½ cubed smoked turkey

Dressing

- ½ cup yogurt
- ½ cup lite mayonnaise
- ½ tsp. cumin
- ½ tsp. curry
- ½ tsp. Spike

Mix dressing and add to other ingredients. Let stand in refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Mix again. Fill halved, opened pita bread with mixture. Garnish with halved cherry tomatoes.

Roast Wild Turkey with Chestnut, Sage and Sausage Stuffing

A non-fruit chestnut stuffing that is good with turkey gravy. Serves 6-8.

The Stock

- Wild turkey giblets and the neck
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 cups water

The Turkey

- 1 big tom turkey

softened butter

½ cup lemon juice

½ cup white wine (optional)

Salt and pepper

The Stuffing

- ½ lb. sausage meat, broken up
- 2 cups chestnuts, peeled and cooked
- 1 large onion, chopped
- ½ tsp. thyme
- 2 ribs celery and leaves, diced
- 4 tsp. butter
- freshly ground pepper
- 3 cups white bread cubed or commercial stuffing cubes

Make a stock by first putting the giblets and neck to boil with bay leaf, then simmer for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile sauté the crumbled sausage. Add the three vegetables and sauté in butter until onions and pepper are soft and the sausage is browned.

In a bowl, mix the remaining stuffing ingredients with the sautéed ingredients, and use the stock to moisten the dressing as needed. Do not make too moist, for the bird should be stuffed loosely; if too moist it will pack like cement. Taste for sage flavor, adjust accordingly.

Stuff and roast the bird according to the above roasting times.

When ready to serve, make gravy of dredging, 2 tablespoons of the fat, the remaining stock, 2 tablespoons of cream and 3 teaspoons of flour.

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TEN COMMANDMENTS OF TURKEY HUNTING SAFETY

Veteran turkey hunter Don Garver of the Illinois Department of Conservation has developed 10 commandments for turkey hunters. He calls them his 10 commandments for staying alive. Some of these tips were given in previous segments as well, but they are worth repeating:

1. Never attempt to approach closer than 100 yards to a gobbler. The hen or gobbler you hear often will be a hunter. The hunter may call so proficiently and realistically that he sounds even better than a real turkey.
2. Never select a calling site with your back to a tree that is smaller than the width of your shoulders. Small trees will not hide slight visible movements of your hands or shoulders that may look like part of a turkey to a hunter stalking your calls. Use that tree to protect your back where you cannot see.
3. Never jump and turn suddenly because you hear a turkey close behind you. That turkey behind you could turn out to be the barrel of a shotgun exploding at you. Wait until the bird walks where you can see it or call it back later.
4. Never select a calling site that does not allow at least 40 yards' visibility in all directions: 75 yards' visibility is even better. Either hunt on top of a ridge where you can see down both sides or hunt at least 40 yards down the slope of a ridge. Good turkey calls may bring in unskilled hunters.
5. Never stalk a turkey. The idea is to call a gobbler to you. If you have tried to call a gobbler to you, do not attempt to move closer. If it is a gobbler, he will probably see you. If it is a hunter, he may shoot you.
6. Be careful when using a gobbler call. When you shake a gobbler call, your hand can look like a turkey's head and the gobble may attract hunters.
7. Do not think because you are fully camouflaged that you are totally invisible. You are plenty visible to both turkeys and hunters when you move slightly. Sitting perfectly still will kill more turkeys than all the camouflage you can wear and sitting still will not get you shot. Turkeys will always see you. The movement is what panics them.
8. Never wear red, white or blue clothing, not even undergarments of those colors. Red is the color many hunters count on to differentiate a gobbler's red dewlap from the blue-colored hen's head. White can look like a snowball head of a gobbler. Leave those white handkerchiefs at home. Blue is the principle color of a hen turkey's head, but this color is found on a gobbler's head as well.
9. Never assume what you hear or what answers you is a turkey.
10. Do not try to hide so well that you cannot see what is happening around you.

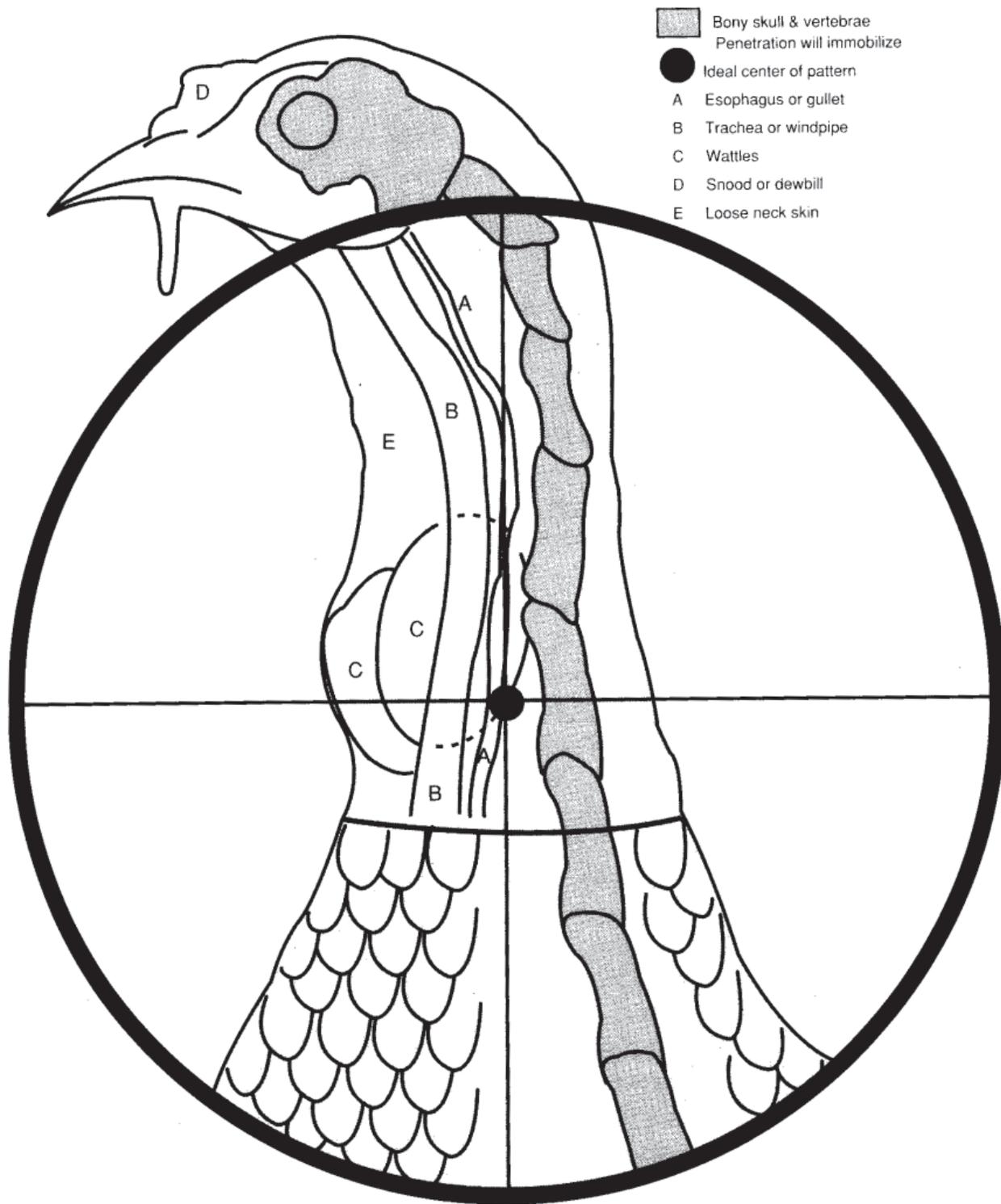
A TURKEY HUNTER'S CODE OF CONDUCT

AS A
RESPONSIBLE TURKEY HUNTER,
I WILL:

1. not let peer pressure or the excitement of the hunt cloud my judgment;
2. learn and practice safe hunting techniques;
3. hunt the wild turkey fairly;
4. know the capabilities and limitations of my gun or bow and use it safely;
5. obey and support all wildlife laws and report all violations;
6. respect the land and the landowner and always obtain written permission before hunting;
7. avoid knowingly interfering with another hunter and respect the right of others to lawfully share the out-of-doors;
8. value the turkey hunting experience and appreciate the beauty of the wild turkey and its habitat;
9. positively identify my target as a legal bird and insist on a good shot;
10. share responsible turkey hunting with others and work for wild turkey conservation.

GLOSSARY OF TURKEY HUNTING TERMS

- Blind (Stand)** an artificial or natural hiding area used to conceal a hunter.
- Bow hunting** hunting using archery equipment
- Brood flock** one or more adult hens with young of year offspring.
- Calling site** the location a turkey hunter establishes to call in a turkey.
- Cannon-netting** a trapping method which propels a net over baited wild turkeys.
- Clutch** the group of eggs laid by one hen in a single nest.
- Droppings** the feces (scat) left by a turkey; used by hunters in tracking wild turkeys.
- Fall hunt** takes place during the fall when wild turkeys are still in same-sex or brood flocks.
- Field dressing** the removal of viscera, feathers and skin, immediately after harvest.
- Friction call** A turkey call which produces sound by rubbing two parts together.
- Game bird** the bird species which are commonly and legally hunted.
- Gobble** A call (sound) produced by male turkeys.
- Gobbler** an adult male turkey; also called a tom.
- Harvest** to catch, capture, take, or kill an animal.
- Hen** an adult female turkey.
- Hunt** to pursue, catch, capture, take, or kill an animal, or attempt to do so.
- Hunter's ethics** a code by which a hunter forms his/her thoughts and actions relating to hunting
- Hunting license** a certification required by law in order to hunt in California
- Hybrid** the offspring produced by crossing individuals of different subspecies or species.
- Introduced species** a species planted (released) in an area which is not native to that area.
- Jake** a juvenile male turkey less than one year of age.
- Jenny** a juvenile female turkey less than one year of age.
- Mast** a food source of nuts produced by hardwood trees such as oaks.
- Natural history** information relating food habits, habitat, distribution, range, and reproduction.
- Patterning a firearm** target testing a firearm in various situations to learn its shooting patterns.
- Patterning wild turkey** learning the daily or seasonal activities of a wild turkey or a flock.
- Poult** a young wild turkey.
- Predator call** a call which produces the sound of a predator (owl, coyote, etc.) of the wild turkey.
- Recovery** retrieval of a wounded or dead turkey that escaped from the original shooting site.
- Roost** a location (tree) where turkeys sleep at night out of reach of most predators.
- Scout** to visit a possible hunt site previous to the hunt in order to gain knowledge of the area.
- Shaker call** a turkey call which produces sound by being shaken.
- Shooting zone** a clear and safe direction in which to discharge a firearm or bow.
- Spring hunt** takes place when wild turkeys are involved in breeding (courtship) behavior.
- Strutting** a courtship dance performed by gobblers to attract hens for breeding purposes.
- Subspecies** a subdivision of a species which are different from one another but can interbreed.
- Take** to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, kill or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture or kill.
- Tom** an adult male turkey (gobbler).
- Topography** a description of the components and layout of a land area.
- Translocation** capture and relocation of turkeys to establish or augment existing populations.
- Turkey call** a device which produces sounds which mimic the calls of wild turkeys.
- Turkey scale** a mechanical device used to measure the weight of a turkey.
- Upland Game Bird Stamp** a stamp required by California law that must be purchased by all adult hunters in order to hunt any upland game bird, including wild turkeys.



Patterning Your Turkey Gun and Load

To see how well your turkey gun and load pattern, copy this target and place it on a board at no more than 40 yards from where you plan to fire your gun. Then fire several loads at the turkey's head and neck each time counting the number of holes in the vital area (immobilization area). Six or more pellets in the vital area indicate a killing pattern. The ideal center of pattern is where the fleshy and feathered portion of the neck meet. Become familiar with the relative size of the turkey by patterning your gun at 25, 35, and 40 yards. Never shoot at a turkey beyond 40 yards.

